

Workplace Policies and Procedures Checklist

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What is a workplace policy?

A policy is a statement which underpins how human resource management issues will be dealt with in an organisation. It communicates an organisation's values and the organisation's expectations of employee behaviours and performance.

Workplace policies often reinforce and clarify standard operating procedure in a workplace. Well written policies help employers manage staff more effectively by clearly defining acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in the workplace, and set out the implications of not complying with those policies.

A workplace policy consists of a statement of purpose and one or more broad guidelines on action to be taken to achieve that purpose. The statement of purpose should be written in simple terms, free of jargon. The length of the policy may vary depending on the issue it addresses.

A policy may allow discretion in its implementation and the basis of that discretion should be stated as part of the policy. A policy may also be required where there is a diversity of interests and preferences, which could result in vague and conflicting objectives among those who are directly involved.

Not all workplace issues require a policy. Many routine matters can be dealt with through simple workplace procedures and processes being put in place.

Benefits of having workplace policies

Well-written workplace policies:

- are consistent with the values of the organisation
- comply with employment and other associated legislation
- demonstrate that the organisation is being operated in an efficient and businesslike manner
- ensure uniformity and consistency in decision-making and operational procedures
- add strength to the position of staff when possible legal actions arise
- save time when a new problem can be handled quickly and effectively through an existing policy
- foster stability and continuity
- maintain the direction of the organisation even during periods of change
- provide the framework for business planning
- assist in assessing performance and establishing accountability
- clarify functions and responsibilities.

Developing and introducing workplace policies

Step 1 – Management Support

It is crucial to have senior management support for the implementation or modification of a policy, especially where policies relate to employee behaviour. The endorsement and modelling of the behaviour by senior managers and supervisors will encourage staff to take the policies seriously. While management support for a policy is an important

first step before actively seeking employee feedback on a proposed policy, the idea for the policy and some of its details may in fact come from staff.

Step 2 - Consult with staff

Involve staff in developing and implementing workplace policies to promote stronger awareness, understanding and ownership of the outcome. Staff involvement also helps to determine how and when the policies might apply, and can assist in identifying possible unintentional outcomes of the policy.

Step 3 - Define the terms of the policy

Be explicit. Define key terms used in the policy at the beginning so that employees understand what is meant. The policy should explain what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in the workplace. You may wish to include specific examples to illustrate problem areas or unacceptable types of behaviours. For example:

An individual shall be deemed to be under the influence of alcohol if he/she exceeds a blood alcohol level of 0.05% (0.02% for heavy vehicle drivers).

Be clear about who the policy applies to. For example, does it only apply to employees of the company or to contractors and sub-contractors engaged to perform work on business premises? This is particularly important, for example, with occupational health and safety which covers everyone in the workplace.

The policy may also need to contain information about what to do if it is not possible to follow the policy. For example, if you have a policy relating to punctuality, you may need to include a procedure outlining what to do if the employee is going to be late.

The policy should also contain procedures to support the policy in its operation, such as the implications for not complying with the policy.

Example 1: Occupational health and safety

No employee is to commence work, or return to work while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. A breach of this policy is grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Example 2: Email policy

Using the organisation's computer resources to seek out, access or send any material of an offensive, obscene or defamatory nature is prohibited and may result in disciplinary action.

Step 4 - Put the policies in writing and publicise them

To be effective, policies need to be publicised and provided to all existing and new employees. This includes casual, part-time and full-time employees and those on maternity leave or career breaks.

Policies should be written in plain English and easily understood by all employees. Consider translating the policies into the appropriate languages for employees whose first language is not English.

Ensure all staff understand what the policies mean. Explain how to comply with the policies and the implications of not complying.

Step 5 - Training and regular referral

The policies may be explained to staff through information and/or training sessions, at staff meetings and during induction sessions for new staff. They should also be reiterated and discussed with staff regularly at staff meetings to ensure they remain relevant.

Copies of policies should be easily accessible. Copies may be kept in folders in a central location or staff areas, in staff manuals and available on the organisation's intranet system.

Step 6 – Implementation

It is important that policies are applied consistently throughout the organisation. A breach of a policy should be dealt with promptly and according to the procedures set out in the policy. The consequence of the breach should also suit the severity of the breach – whether it be a warning, disciplinary action or dismissal.

Case study

An organisation which dismissed an employee for sexual harassment was subsequently ordered to re-employ the sacked staff member as they had failed to follow their own policy. The company had a policy of zero tolerance to sexual harassment but failed to exercise the provision when the policy was breached. The Commission hearing revealed that the company had breached its own policy when it issued the employee numerous unofficial warnings instead.

Step 7 - Evaluate and review

Review policies regularly to ensure they are current and in line with any changes within the organisation. Where policies are significantly changed they should be re-issued to all staff and the changes explained to them to ensure they understand the organisation's new directions. These changes should also be widely publicised.

Policy checklist

A workplace policy should:

- set out the aim of the policy
- explain why the policy was developed
- list who the policy applies to
- set out what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour
- set out the consequences of not complying with the policy
- provide a date when the policy was developed or updated.

Policies also need to be reviewed on a regular basis and updated where necessary. For example, if there is a change in equipment or workplace procedures you may need to amend your current policy or develop a new one.

Employment law changes, changes to your award or agreement may also require a review of your policies and procedures. Stay up to date with relevant changes by regularly checking [Fair Work Ombudsman](#) .

Types of workplace policies

Here are some examples of common workplace policies that could assist your workplace:

- code of conduct
- recruitment policy
- internet and email policy
- mobile phone policy
- non-smoking policy
- drug and alcohol policy
- health and safety policy
- anti-discrimination and harassment policy
- grievance handling policy
- discipline and termination policy
- using social media.